Socialized Engineering

Pro and Con

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IN any intelligent discussion of a subject the terms involved should be thoroughly understood. This is especially true in the case of any debatable topic. Engineering could be defined as a profession that employs persons with varying degrees of ability and training in the field of applied science. As a corollary to this the professional engineer might be defined as one whose primary functions are planning and directing production. It is this latter group in which we are primarily concerned. Socialized engineering implies by its name either a collective or governmental management of engineering work. Such a plan would convert the engineering profession into one large group of engineers controlled by public authority or by the organized professions themselves.

In the past, the engineer has been an economic individualist. This is true to a certain extent during the war today, but we must realize that the future trend of engineering as a whole is toward a dependent profession. This is evidenced by the fact that today most of our engineers are employees of someone else. This might be distasteful for the pioneer engineers of the early Twentieth Century who grew up during a period of great industrial expansion. There is still expansion ahead of us, but there are also new social problems which must be met by engineers as well as other professional workers. Henry A. Wallace, our Vice-President and former Secretary of Agriculture, has said:

"It is difficult to see how the engineer and the scientist can much longer preserve a complete isolation from the economic and social world about them. A world motivated by economic individualism has repeatedly come to the edge of the abyss, and this last time possibly came within a hair's breadth of plunging over . . . It seems to me that the emphasis of both engineering and science in the future must be shifted more and more toward the sympathic understanding of the complexities of life, as contrasted with the simple mathematical mechanical understanding of material production."

Although the socialization of engineering might help solve some of the problems of society, there are the problems concerned with engineering as a science. Engineering has gone almost hand in hand with the development of our country. American engineering allows experimentation and flexibility, and as such has brought about major advances. That socialized engineering would defeat this is fairly evident by a study of European engineering. European engineering has been built up on the "socialized plan", and it is generally conceded that our engineering methods are superior to those of Europe.

It is still doubtful that any worker, including an engineer will work as hard when he is working for the whole group as when he is working for himself alone. The superior engineer will lag in his efficiency because of the decrease in his earnings and the restriction of his opportunities for advancement.

Big business would probably collapse under a system of socialized engineering because all competition would cease. And whatever evils there are in business competition, it is this competition which makes it possible for us to buy the low cost, high quality products of our modern age.